

# Protesters remain in prison with little contact, food or health care

Tuesday 20 December 2005, by [Focus on the Global South](#) (Date first published: 20 December 2005).

**News Update 20/12/05: 944 protesters have now been released and there are 14 who have been charged with unlawful assembly.**

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DECEMBER 19 - As many as 800 people are still locked up behind bars and held incommunicado a day after they were arrested protesting against the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations here in Hong Kong. This is the biggest number of people arrested in any WTO ministerial protests since its inception.

Despite insistent inquiries from local and international organizations here, the Hong Kong government has refused to state exactly how many are still under detention and to provide the detainees' names.

While the police released about 190 women detainees early this morning, as many as 600 Koreans, most of them farmers, could still be in jail. Apart from the Koreans, reports indicate that there are still 51 Thais, 17 Indonesians, 3 Bangladeshis, 2 French, 1 American, 1 British, and 1 Indian being held in as many as 18 police stations and detention center all over Hong Kong.

Organizations from around the world, supported by local Hong Kong groups, are calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the detainees.

They maintain that those arrested were exercising their legitimate right to assembly, to free expression, and to defend themselves against the WTO. They also point out that the protesters did not attack the Hong Kong people nor did they damage any private establishment.

The Hong Kong police threw tear gas and cracked down on the protesters last December 17 after they managed to reach the gates of the convention center where the ministerial was being held. Most of those arrested were part of the 1,000-strong contingent that managed to regroup and that resolved to stay on in front of the convention center through the night. The Hong Kong police slowly surrounded them from all sides and began arresting them one by one.

According to Hong Kong's permanent secretary for the security bureau Mr Ying, "the detainees will be processed strictly according to our law and according to established procedures." In a meeting with the international and local groups who participated in the protests, he said Hong Kong intends to show that it is a government that follows the "rule of law."

Activists, however, point out that - with the way it arrested and with the way it is now treating the detainees - the Hong Kong government is exactly showing the opposite of that. They decried the inhumane treatment of the detainees by the police and the human rights abuses committed by the Hong Kong police.

"It is unacceptable that the detainees could not be contacted and that they have no access to legal services," said Rafael Alegria of the international farmers' federation La Via Campesina, many of whose members were among those detained. Even the Indonesian and Thailand consulates reportedly had difficulties getting information about their nationals. According to some of those who have been freed, they were not even told where they were when they asked.

"We have been in previous demonstrations before but the way governments have responded have never been this severe," Alegria said.

A number of detainees need urgent medical attention and specialized medication which are not being provided by the police, according to those who have managed to relay information from inside the detention cells. One Spanish farmer suffering from severe bronchitis was rushed to the hospital but the police insisted he remained handcuffed while lying in bed and with his oxygen mask on.

According to Korean women who were released from detention, they were handcuffed, hungry, and cold the entire time they were in the hands of the police. It took hours to get permission to go to the bathroom. One Korean woman, who refused to let go of her bag and hand it to the police, was slapped in the face. They also said they have no information whatsoever on the remaining 600 Koreans still in detention.

"The detainees are being held incommunicado," said Brid Brennan of the Amsterdam-based Transnational Institute. "There's no other way to describe this grievous human rights violation and it's a shame."

Titi Soentoro of the Chiang Mai-based Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development reported that the Indonesian women who were arrested were not given food for an entire day and that up to twenty of them were cramped in a small 3-meter by 1-meter room.

Another detainee still being held by the police, Sunil Mishra, a member of a state legislative assembly in India, managed to relay how the four of them sharing one small detention cell had to share one toilet in the cell and to relieve themselves in front of others.

"Hong Kong prides itself as respecting the rule of law," said Shalmali Guttal of Focus on the Global South. "But the laws that the Hong Kong police seem to go by are primitive and are as undemocratic and untransparent as the World Trade Organization." #

\* Call, e-mail, or fax the Hong Kong authorities. Below are their contact numbers and addresses and a sample letter. You are also encouraged to compose your own letters. Please cc info focusweb.org when you send them e-mail.

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## SAMPLE LETTER TO HONG KONG AUTHORITIES

(Date)

Dear Sir:

We are outraged by your government's arrest and detention of hundreds of people exercising their right to assembly, to free expression, and to defend themselves against the WTO.

We are appalled by how you are treating these detainees.

These actions do not have any place in a city like Hong Kong that prides itself in upholding democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

We join the global call for the immediate and unconditional release of all the detainees.

Yours,

(Name)

(Organization)

(Address)

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#### HONG KONG AUTHORITIES<sup>1</sup> CONTACT DETAILS

Send to:

Mr Kevin Ho  
Wan Chai Police Headquarters  
Tel: (852) 2828 7509  
Fax: (852) 2507 2020

Mr. Ambrose S K Lee  
Secretary for Security  
Tel: (852) 2810 2712  
Fax: (852) 2877 0636  
Email: sbenq sb.gov.hk

Ms. Ada Wong Ying-kay  
Chairperson, Wan Chai District Council  
Tel: (852) 2835 1984  
Fax: (852) 2834 9667  
Email: wcdcadm wcdc.had.gov.hk

Mr Dick MK Lee  
Commissioner of Police  
Tel: (852) 2860 2001  
Fax: (852) 2865 6546  
email: cp police.gov.hk